

The case for a dollar-coin still rolls along

By Roger Boye

Legislation calling for a circulating dollar coin likely will reappear in Congress in 1991 as lobbyists continue their efforts to promote the controversial proposal.

This year the dollar-coin issue failed to come up for a vote in either the U. S. Senate or House. A bill that died when Congress adjourned last month would have forced Uncle Sam to produce a gold-colored dollar made mostly of copper and to phase out the \$1 Federal Reserve note.

"Each month we get more and more editorial support [from U. S. newspapers] for a dollar coin," said James C. Benfield, executive director of the Coin Coalition, a lobbying organization.

Last spring, the U. S. General Accounting Office concluded that the government could save nearly \$320 million a year by replacing dollar bills with dollar coins, assuming the coins were widely used. But the GAO added that officials would have to cope with

negative public reaction to such a change because the majority of Americans would rather use paper dollars.

It costs 2.6 cents to produce a dollar bill, which usually wears out after about 17 months of use. A copper-nickel-clad dollar would cost 6 cents to make but would last in circulation for more than 20 years, making the coin much more cost effective.

In the congressional session that ended last month, 133 of 435 House members and 31 of 100 senators co-signed dollar-coin legislation. But some other lawmakers thought a round dollar would flop, as did the Susan B. Anthony dollar a decade ago.

Few people used the Anthony dollar, in part because it was the same color and nearly the same size as a quarter. But Benfield said the coin failed because the government did not eliminate the \$1 bill at the same time.

In a report to Congress last June, the U. S. Mint said that success of a new dollar coin would hinge on removing the \$1

bill and that such a switch could increase demand for \$2 bills and decrease use of quarters. The Coin Coalition also believes that a new coin would fail if the dollar bill were not phased out.

Benfield said the change to a dollar coin wouldn't be popular at first, but people would accept it in time.



The U. S. Mint is selling bronze medals that honor Andrew Wyeth and include a profile of him drawn by his son, Jamie.

The "tails side" includes Wyeth's initials in the same style and spacing used by Wyeth on his paintings. Each medal duplicates a Congressional Gold Medal that President Bush gave to Wyeth on Oct. 24.

To order, send a check or money order payable to the United States Mint to the mint at 10001 Aerospace Drive, Lanham, Md. 20706. A 3-inch medal costs \$21 and a 1½-inch medal—which has a much smaller surface area—is \$2.25.